The Use of Online Platforms for Content Delivery: Mapping Students' Viewing Habits of Web Series on OTT Platforms

Saravanan.V.M - Research Scholar, Dr Vahini - Coordinator,
Department of Electronic Media, Bangalore university, Bangalore.

ABSTRACT
With the growing popularity of streaming platforms films web series has emerged as an important subsidiary entertaining ingredient of the Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms. As some of the OTT platforms produce both original content and depend on television series, the availability the content proliferation on streaming platforms is immense. With the help of uses and gratification theory (UGT), this study investigates the impact of binge watching web series on students. Using a cross sectional survey (N=500), this paper examines the impact of watching web series on everyday life. The possible implications of binge watching web series is discussed in the present paper taking into consideration the lifestyle and habits of respondents through quantitative and qualitative methods that has practical and theoretical implications to the student community and the practitioners in the area of digital streaming platforms.
KEYWORDS: web series, uses and gratification theory, cultural indicators, cultivation theory, OTT, web series

I.   INTRODUCTION

The Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms are changing the landscape of Indian media content production and consumption. This phenomenal change in the media and entertainment arena offers researchers to dwell deep into the many ways the platformizations has affected the culture in different geographical spaces. The OTT in India is in a burgeoning stage and the predictions made by media suggest that the Indian video OTT will exceed the global video OTT market (The Economic Times, 2019). A report by PricewaterhouseCoopers predicts that by 2022 the Indian OTT video content will be one of the top ten OTT video markets in the world (PWC, 2018). Popularity of consuming OTT video content can be pegged down to the technological advancements combined with better telecom infrastructure that has taken place in India over the last decade.

Following the telephony revolution introduced by the Jio network, internet access has become affordable which has led to heavy data consumption. This has truly altered the way Indians consume content online and has led OTT services like Amazon Prime, Netflix, Eros Now, Voot, Hotstar, among many others to take flight in a massive manner. As the Indian digital entertainment industry and mobile operators are undergoing a dynamic shift and focusing on OTT, the Indian consumers have diverse options of content streaming applications leading to binging content online. The major broadcasters in India provide major content for free with advertisements and premium content based on a subscription basis. With the availability of free VoD and high data storage became affordable the inkling of binging has gained popularity post digitalization. The digestible content of web series has paved way to the golden age Web-native series. The transition from television to web series could be attributed to the space that the OTT platforms provide. The pauses and space that a viewer of a web series gets to experience is unaffordable on traditional television viewing expedition. The communion of break with content that web series provides in an open tab is seamless to a viewer which all carefully curated by the makers (Syme, 2013).

Web-series also known as cyber-soaps as new media network attempts to replicate but also differentiate themselves from legacy media. American platform Netflix has prioritized India to expand its footing by setting itself a benchmark of 100 million subscribers in the country in the near future. Netflix's first Indian original *Sacred Games* – a story based on the 2006 thriller novel by Vikram Chandra garnered much popularity within the release of its first four episodes premiered on 30 June 2018**.** It became the most in-demand title in India for the month of July 2018 (Bansal, 2018; Parrot Analytics, 2018). The web series became more popular overseas**,** with 2 out of 3 people who watched Sacred Games were outside of India (Hindustan Times, 2018). While Sacred Games fairs well on Netflix, Amazon Prime's Mirzapur becomes one of the most popular web series in India in terms of online searches (Sheth, 2020). Of the two most searched series in India, both offer a peek into the countries criminal world. These web series spins around the stories of crime, contention and wrongdoings,

including drug dealing and weapons. These shows juxtapose the real and supernatural which allows the action and fate to intersect between the narratives (IWM Buzz, 2020; Business World, 2020).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The uses and gratification theory in the conventional sense is used to study the impact of new media influence on people's lives. The theory has largely tooled to analyze several media that alters people's habits and provides reasons to consume media. At the center of OTT influence studies is the audience who indulges in binging online content from streaming services.

Through theories built uses and gratification, the present study also traces the hedonic consumption Hirschman & Holbrook (1982) patterns on OTT streaming services. The audience through streaming platforms experiences multisensory, fantasy and emotional arousal through web series that is an essential part of the hedonic consumption theoretical frame works. Just like that of television viewing, web series offer instant gratification to its audience providing a roughly unconventional ecosphere.

Katz et al. in his article *Uses and Gratifications Research* makes basic assumptions about uses and gratification. The assumptions bring to understanding the conjecture of certain qualities of the web series consumer that the viewer is motivated in choosing the web series that the viewer selects. Also, the selection of the series is purposive and the medium (web series) itself competes with other sources of need satisfaction (Roy, S. K, 2008)

Therefore, when the individuals seek information it is deliberate and intended. Long term viewing of web series has possible effects and reactions in the society just like that of television sought reactions from the public.

Objectives of the study
1.   To understand the students' viewing habits of web series on OTT platforms.
2.   To analyse the impact of binge watching web series on students.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study is an attempt to demystify the growing popularity of web series on streaming platforms. The study was conducted during the lockdown period in the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is limited to Bangalore city in Karnataka. According various mass media theories, greater exposure leads to greater media impact, and thus, when people measure the impact of media content on its users, they take into account what they know about the exposure of these other people to the specific media content. This explanation was called the perceived exposure corollary (Eveland *et.al* , 1999; Tsfati & Cohen, 2012)   To analyze the impact of web series on viewers the study is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of both uses and gratification theory (UGT) and cultivation theory.

The uses and gratification theory in the conventional sense is used to study the impact of new media influence on people's lives. The theory has largely tooled to analyze several media that alters people's habits and provides reasons to consume media. At the center of OTT influence studies is the audience who indulges in binging online content from streaming services. A case study method was employed to carry out this study. While studying the influence of web series on audience, theoretical frameworks like UGT, By pooling information from web series audience through quantitative methods, this research study collects data through questionnaire technique and examines the various variables within the collected data.

An online survey is conducted in Bangalore city with the help of Google forms. Data from 500 samples who are active viewers of web –series were collected. A snow ball sampling method is used in data collection and researchers tried to maintain Gender equality as far as possible. Students from class 10th to Post Graduate were used for the study.

A case study in Bangalore
In the pursuit for content and driving audience towards over the top platforms, the streaming services seem to have successfully attract the young audience in India. As per Counterpoint Research's Survey on India OTT Video Content Market Consumer indication 89% of total Indian OTT video content platform users are fall under the age group of 35 years. The same study also reveals that the top five Indian metros account for more than half of the OTT video content platform user base (Mahendra, 2019; Bhatia, 2019)**.** With huge young user base, OTT impact has also come under scanner. A case reported at National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore suggests an extreme addiction to Netflix by 26 year old male whose parents forced their son for a treatment against binge-watching. The patient had to undergo a de-addiction treatment at the Service for Healthy Use of Technology clinic located in NIMHANS. The man, who is unemployed and whose friend's success warranted binge-watching has confessed that watching shows has

enabled him to cope with his issues. Binge watching allowed the man to disengage from reality and find escape, thereby making him feel relaxed.

The binge-watching culture has led to a debate around the censorship of content on OTT. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed by Padmanabh Shankar to which the Karnataka High court seeks to regulate streaming platforms under the Cinematography Act (The New Indian Express, 2019). The PIL raised positions that there is a requirement of legislative framework regulating the broadcast of films, serials etc on the internet content distributed by the streaming platforms. As per the public litigation, petitioner has stated that the multimedia content broadcasted through the streaming sites often depict vulgarity (Aditya, 2019). Thus, the issues related to the OTT content particularly web series raise concerns about the content on streaming services and its impact on audience while pays way for deliberating the influence of streaming services in society.

The data was analysed in terms of average time spent on viewing web series and cultural impact. Descriptive statistical analysis such as Mean and Standard deviation is used in this study. SPSS Version 22 is used for data analysis.

IV. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

For the study, web series audience was defined as anybody who uses streaming platforms like the OTT to consume audio-visual content especially web series. Branded content, original content and TV shows were taken into consideration. The below are the key definitions used in the study.

Impact: Impact is an influence which sustains over period of time. It is slow, steady and dynamic change over a period of time.

Web series: A web series is a sequel of scripted or non-scripted videos generally in episodic form hosted in an online streaming platform enables the viewers to binge watch linear or nonlinear style in their smart phones, laptop or television.

Measure	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	243	48.6
	Female	282	51.4
Age	15-20	234	44.6
	21-25	168	32.0

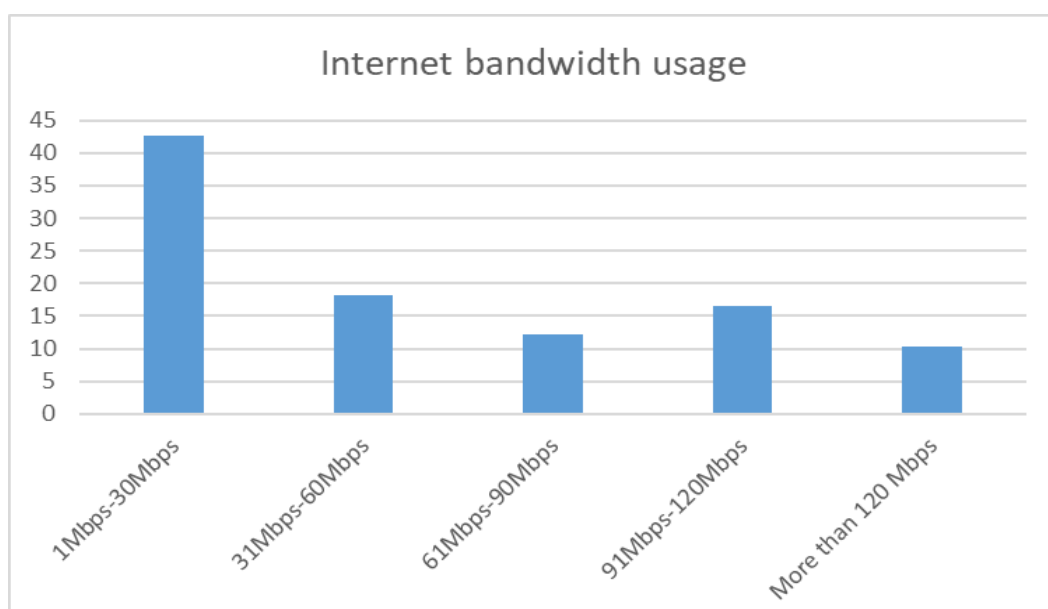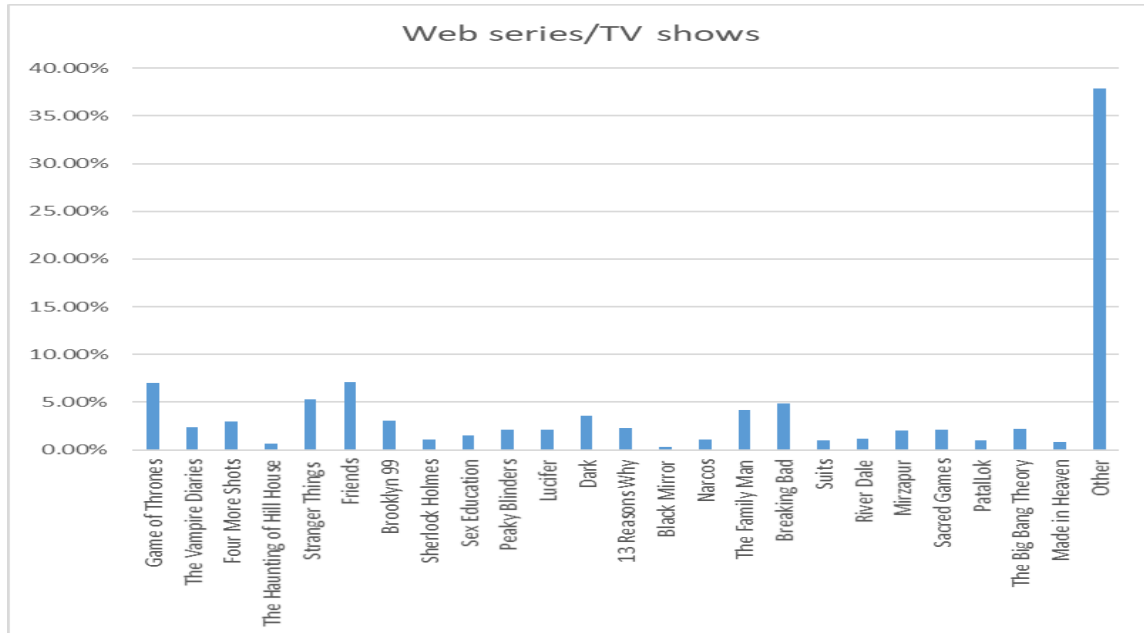| Education	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Education	**Higher Primary**	**2**	**0.4**
	10th Grade	3	0.6
	12th Grade	91	17.3
	Diploma	9	1.7
	Graduate	287	54.7
	Post Graduate	115	21.9

Figure1. Internet Speed (Source- Field Survey; N=500)

Figure 2. Favourite web-series (Source- Field Survey; N=500)

Cultural impact indicators	Percentage of Respondents						
	S.D (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	S.A (5)	**Mean**	**Std. Dev**
Interaction with family friends reduced	11.6	31.6	19.0	25.8	12.0	**2.95**	**1.232**
Cable TV viewing Reduced	09.6	27.6	14.8	32.8	15.2	**3.16**	**1.254**
Sleep is affected	14.2	24.8	10.8	36.2	14.0	**3.11**	**1.315**
Reduced socialisation	29.2	42.4	9.8	13.4	05.2	**2.23**	**1.159**
Study / reading affected	9.0	34.4	16.6	29.8	10.2	**2.98**	**1.188**

Source: Online survey; N=500 (S.A – Strongly Agree, A- Agree, D –Disagree, S.D – Strongly Disagree, N – Neutral)

V. MAJOR FINDINGS

For the study, average time spend on watching web series as the independent variable and 22 cultural impact indicators as dependent variables. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess if there were differences between the time spend on viewing web- series groups on a linear combination. This study result showed that web –series is gaining popularity in India particularly in metro cities like Bangalore. Descriptive analysis of viewers' perceptions and reactions shows that viewers' life style and culture is changed as interaction with family and friends reduced, Cable TV viewing reduced, reading habit reduced. This shows that web-series have far reaching implications in traditional Indian social structure. The gratification received from the series is making them glued to their favorite series. As the average time spend on watching web-series increases viewers are adopting or accepting certain cultural norms

The gratification received from the series is making them glued to their favorite series. As the average time spend on watching web-series increases viewers are adopting or accepting certain cultural norms shown in web series in real life indicating many of the traditional cultural taboos in Indian society are eroding. Heavy viewers of web series tend to show greater degree of acceptance of cultural practices in real life than moderate and light viewers. There is no significant difference was found between Male and female viewers in accepting or adopting cultural practices from web series.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study indicates that majority of web series viewers are young audience between the age group of 15 to 25 years. Recent reports underscore the findings of the study and reveal certain issues that prevail among younger audience especially teens as they have access to uncensored content. Parents and teachers alike raise concerns about teenagers viewing content on streaming platforms and shows that are available on OTT like Game of Thrones which is the most watched show according the present study. The HBO show for its final season was made available to Indian audience on Hotstar in its original uncensored form (Arora, 2019). Game of Thrones is high on explicit scenes like sex, violence and crime that are inappropriate to Indian teenage audience (Conway, 2019). Game of Thrones is one of the most popular shows of the decade which has over 25 million viewers per episode across the globe which also witnessed rampant piracy through illegal platforms (Hughes, 2019; Gartenberg, 2019). However, the Indian television aired the show by censoring content to appropriate Indian broadcasting laws on Star World (Chari, 2017). The popularity of TV shows made available through OTT heave a debate about the content of and its impact on young viewers. Teachers suggest that children who watch shows for a longer time demonstrate a change in behavior and other studies related to binge watching web series signify a negative social and psychological impact on young individuals (Sudeep & Asif, 2020; Dhanuka & Bohra, 2019).

Internet speed determines the time spent on various internet platforms and 4G availability continuous to expand in India with metropolitan cities comprising the fastest mean fixed broadband download. A report by Ookla indicates that Bangalore is the second city amongst other metropolitan cities to have fastest mean internet download speed in India (Business Line, 2019; Crounch, 2019). This study suggests that the average internet speed of the users is 31-60 Mbps which is tandem with the Ookla report. The availability of high-speed internet and cheap data pack harvest binge watching content through internet abled devices especially mobile phones.

Long duration of watching television has an impact on the cognitive behaviour of its audience. The quality of work and engaging in different activities may be disrupted due to watching video content especially for entertainment purpose alone (Rothwell, 2019). Rather than the content, the other ways of spending time take a backseat because of binge watching shows. The past studies have revealed that long term of television viewing has may have a negative impact on the social and cognitive abilities (Hancox et.al. 2005). With the invasion of web series, the present studies reveal that reading habits, social media usage, work and studies are affected due to heavy viewing of web series. The sleep pattern of the present survey is significantly affected due to watching web series. This is similar to the way in which heavy viewing of television has resulted in sleep impairments of individuals. Further investigation into problems related to sleep like restlessness, difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep is recommended to better understand the relationship between sleep disorders and binge-watching web series (Nag & Pradhan, 2012).

REFERENCES:

[1]. Aditya, A.K. (2019). Karnataka HC issues notice in petition calling for Netflix, Amazon to be brought under Cinematograph Act. *Bar and Bench.* (2 March, 2019) Retrieved from: https://www.barandbench.com/news/karnataka-hc-netflix-amazon-cinematograph-act

[2]. Arora, A (2019, April 1). Game of Thrones Season 8 Will Be Simulcast on Hotstar in India. *NDTV Gadgets.* Retrieved from: https://gadgets.ndtv.com/entertainment/news/game-of-thrones-season-8-india-simulcast-hotstar-2015758

[3]. Bansal, S (2018, October 11). Netflix's Indian series Sacred Games gets worldwide recognition. *Media India Group.* Retrieved from: https://mediaindia.eu/cinema/netflixs-indian-series-sacred-games-gets-worldwide-recognition/

[4]. Bhatia Maji. N. (2020, January 8). YouTube India: 2020 Will See Further Rise In Regional Content, Gaming. Business World. Retrieved from: http://www.businessworld.in/article/YouTube-India-2020-Will-See-Further-Rise-In-Regional-Content-Gaming/08-01-2020-181715/

[5]. Chari, M (2017, July 6). Why the censored 'Game of Thrones' on Indian television is so much better than you think. *Scroll.* Retrieved from: https://scroll.in/reel/842459/why-the-censored-game-of-thrones-on-indian-television-is-so-much-better-than-you-think

[6]. Chennai has fastest wireline broadband, Mumbai tops in mobile internet speeds (2019, October 23). Business Line. Retrieved from: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/info-tech/chennai-has-fastest-wireline-broadband-mumbai-tops-in-mobile-internet-speeds/article29775593.ece

[7]. Conway. P (2019, April 13). 9 TV shows like Game of Thrones for teens. *AOL.* Retrieved from: https://www.aol.com/article/lifestyle/2019/04/13/9-tv-shows-like-game-of-thrones-for-teens/23030503/

[8]. Crounch, E (2019, October 21). Exploring Recent Trends in the India Telecom Market. Speedtest. Retrieved from: https://www.speedtest.net/insights/blog/india-telecom-market-2019/

[9]. Dhanuka, A., & Bohra, A. Binge-Watching: Web-Series Addiction amongst Youth.

[10]. Eveland , W. P., Jr. , Nathanson , A. I. , Detenber , B. H. , & McLeod , D. M. (1999) Rethinking the social distance corollary: Perceived likelihood of exposure and the third - person perception . *Communication Research*, 26 (3), 275 – 302 .

[11]. Gartenberg, C (2019, April 17). Game of Thrones' season 8 premiere was pirated almost 55 million times in the first 24 hours. *The Verge.* Retrieved from: https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/17/18412159/game-of-thrones-got-season-8-premiere-pirated-55-million-times-first-24-hours-hbo

[12]. Hancox, R. J., Milne, B. J., & Poulton, R. (2005). Association of television viewing during childhood with poor educational achievement. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine*, *159*(7), 614-618.

[13]. Hindustan Times (2018) 2 out of 3 people who watched Sacred Games were outside of India: Netflix on spreading its content. (2018, November 8)..Retrieved from: https://www.hindustantimes.com/bollywood/2-out-of-3-people-who-watched-sacred-games-were-outside-of-india-netflix-on-spreading-its-content/story-2E5K1Rr6zJ9xbYBPiZKKRN.html

[14]. Hirschman, E. C., & Holbrook, M. B. (1982). Hedonic consumption: emerging concepts, methods and propositions. *Journal of marketing*, *46*(3), 92-101.

[15]. Hughes, S (2019, December 30). Game of Thrones: how it dominated the decade – then lost its way. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/dec/30/game-of-thrones-best-tv-2010s

[16]. IWM Buzz (2019) The rise of web-series in India. (14 July, 2019). Retrieved from: https://www.iwmbuzz.com/digital/snippets-digital/rise-web-series-india/2019/07/14#:~:text=Web%20Series%20the%20trend%20that%20is%20running%20India.&text=Like%20Netflix%2C%20Amazon%20Prime%20and,Bahu%20serials%20and%20melodramatic%20situationss.

[17]. Katz, E., & Fialkoff, Y. (2017).Six concepts in search of retirement. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *41*(1), 86-91.

[18]. Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973).Uses and gratifications research. *The public opinion quarterly*, *37*(4), 509-523.

[19]. Mahendra, V (2019, June 19). Top 5 metro cities account for 55% of the total video OTT users, while Tier I cities account for 36% of the users: Survey. *The Economic Times.* Retrieved from: https://brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/media/top-5-metro-cities-account-for-55-of-the-total-video-ott-users-while-tier-i-cities-account-for-36-of-the-users-survey/69855110

[20]. Mahendra, V (2019, June 19). Top 5 metro cities account for 55% of the total video OTT users, while Tier I cities account for 36% of the users: Survey. *The Economic Times.* Retrieved from: https://brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/media/top-5-metro-cities-account-for-55-of-the-total-video-ott-users-while-tier-i-cities-account-for-36-of-the-users-survey/69855110

[21]. Maji. N. (2020, January 8). YouTube India: 2020 Will See Further Rise In Regional Content, Gaming. Business World. Retrieved from: http://www.businessworld.in/article/YouTube-India-2020-Will-See-Further-Rise-In-Regional-Content-Gaming/08-01-2020-181715/

[22]. Nag, C., & Pradhan, R. K. (2012). Impact of television on sleep habits. Biological Rhythm Research, 43(4), 423-430.

[23]. Provocative content growing on OTT platforms, government serious. (2019, September 4). The New Indian Express. Retrieved from: https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2019/sep/04/provocative-content-growing-on-ott-platforms-government-serious-2028755.html

[24]. PWC. 2018. *Video on demand: Entertainment reimagined.* Retrieved from: https://www.pwc.in/research-insights/2018/video-on-demand.html

[25]. Rothwell, J (2019, July 25). You Are What You Watch? The Social Effects of TV. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/25/upshot/social-effects-television.html

[26]. Roy, S. K. (2008). Determining uses and gratifications for Indian Internet users. *Case studies in business, industry and government statistics*, *2*(2), 78-91.

[27]. Sheth, H. (2020, July 17). Mirzapur most searched web series followed by Sacred Games. *Business Line.* Retrieved from: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/variety/mirzapur-most-searched-web-series-followed-by-sacred-games-report/article32111733.ece

[28]. Sudeep, T & Asif, M (2020, January 5). Parents worry over teenagers' access to OTT content. Deccan Herald. Retrieved from: https://www.deccanherald.com/metrolife/metrolife-lifestyle/parents-worry-over-teenagers-access-to-ott-content-791582.html

[29]. Syme, R. (2013, September 9). Why Web TV Series Are Worth Watching. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/why-web-tv-series-are-worth-watching

[30]. The 'Digital First' Journey (2017, October). KPMG Report. Retrieved from: https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/in/pdf/2017/10/The-Digital-First-journey.pdf

[31]. The impact of Netflix's Sacred Games in India. (2018, August 24). *Parrot Analytics.* Retrieved from: https://www.parrotanalytics.com/company#about-us

[32]. Tsfati, Y., & Cohen, J. (2012). Perceptions of media and media effects: The third person effect, trust in media and hostile media perceptions. *The international encyclopedia of media studies*. Retrieved from: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/9781444361506.wbiems995